

Henry County Times

Celebrating Henry County



Probate Court continues issuing marriage licenses

• Monroe Roark 🕒 April 9, 2020 ✍ No Comments

The coronavirus is stopping a great many activities across Henry County and the rest of Georgia, but it is not stopping people from getting married.

"We are open for essential functions, and one of those is issuing marriage licenses," said Probate Judge Kelley Powell. "That is something we are still doing."



Although requests have slowed, Probate Judge Kelley Powell is still issuing marriage licenses. However, due to Coronavirus restrictions, appointments must be made in order to process a license request.

Special photo

As a judge and the person whose office carries out the licensing responsibilities, Powell also has her fair share of opportunities to officiate weddings, particularly around Valentine's Day. But there have not been any requests for that service of late.

"I haven't had anybody ask me to marry them," she said. "I think they're in need of the license more than the officiant."

IN STOCK**S**

As the coronavirus began to impact government business throughout the state, the Judicial Council of Georgia and Council of Probate Judges had to decide which functions of each county's probate court should be deemed essential, or "still important to life and liberty," as Powell put it.

"We had to decide what it is that we still have to provide and want to provide," she said. "One of those is the right to marry."

As those who have actually been wed for any length of time can attest, marriage is about more than just its romantic aspects. There is a very practical side that includes many important financial considerations. Scores of companies offer healthcare and other employee benefits that are also available for spouses. Death benefits and other legal matters are more easily resolved when the surviving partner is recognized as a legal spouse.

"You don't want to think about that when planning a wedding, but people need it more than ever right now," said Powell.

About 20 marriage licenses per week are processed during regular operations. Right now that weekly number is around 14, and they are handled by appointment only for people whose weddings are already planned or who are to be married within a couple of weeks.

"We only have a finite number of appointments we are setting," the judge said. "We are doing them on the hour so we have time to complete them, since each one takes about 30 minutes."

IN STOCK**S**

The Probate Court building was remodeled a few years ago to create more customer service stations, which means faster service – when there isn't a pandemic shutting down government offices around the world. Those stations do not have personal protection for either the customer or the employee, so most of them now sit empty. The court staff had to get creative and make some modifications.

A single customer service station has been set up in the lobby, just beyond the glass double doors inside the building's main entrance. An employee communicates with the customers through the glass, sending paperwork by computer through a printer on the customer's side, where it can be signed and returned without actual physical contact. Instead of swiping a credit card for fee payment, the customer holds it up to the glass so the employee can see it and enter the information manually.

Couples can access marriage license applications online and fill them out in advance. The signatures must be verified, so the applicants bring them to the court at the time of the appointment and hold them up to the glass for the employee, who witnesses the signatures before the applicants use the copy machine on their side of the glass to make copies.

"We actually print out the marriage license and put that in an envelope and pass it through the tiny opening between the double doors," said Powell. "We are doing all of this by appointment because we don't want the customers to worry about how safe it is to come in here."

The deputy who is stationed at the court entrance wipes down everything – outside doors, inside doors, computers and printers, all of it – after each customer leaves.

"You have to get creative," said Powell. "We are making it work. Most people have actually been so grateful that we have been trying to operate and protect their safety and ours at the same time."



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Community Coronavirus, Marriage Licenses, Probate Court

About Monroe Roark

Monroe Roark has been covering the news in Henry County for more than a quarter-century, starting in 1992. He has owned homes here and raised a family here. He still enjoys staying on top of the important matters that affect his friends in the community.

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